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ABSTRACT

A cooperative venture between the University of West Florida and the Okaloosa County (Florida) school district addressed the concerns of two rural communities over changing school and community characteristics and the need for basic skills instruction for elementary and secondary school students. To meet and expand upon objectives of Teacher Corps graduate programs, a Graduate Program Task Force studied characteristics of the schools and the communities. It was decided that a field-based program would involve most faculty members in the graduate program, would have a direct impact on the school and community, and would cause faculty and interested community members to participate in appropriate preservice and inservice activities. Since no field-based graduate programs in education existed at the university, courses were modified to meet the needs of the new program participants. Four Teacher Corps interns and 28 local teachers began the degree program in the fall of 1979. The program consisted of core courses, elective seminars, directed independent studies, and individual specializations culminating in a major project. The program was scheduled to allow a combination of coursework and classroom observation. Three major strategies were used to accomplish the goal of inservice education and staff development: (1) participation in an action research project or practicum; (2) use of an extended interaction partner system; and (3) development of a portfolio of competencies by the interns. (FG)

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A Field-Based Graduate Program Which Works for Individual Teachers and Total School Staff Development.

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"A Field-Based Graduate Program Which
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INTRODUCTION:

The University of West Florida/Okaloosa County Teacher Corps Project is the result of a cooperative pursuit by The University of West Florida and the Okaloosa County, Florida school system. The original proposal outlined a five-year plan designed to strengthen the educational opportunities available to rural children from low-income homes. The project schools were Baker (K-12) and Holt (K-4). These two schools, located in the extreme western section of Okaloosa County, in Northwest Florida, serve the needs of 958 students from the nearby farming communities of Holt, Milligan, Escambia Farms, Baker, Beaver Creek, Nubbin Ridge, Rock Hill and Blackman.

Teacher Corps' projects in 1978 were required to incorporate active collaboration between local community public schools and institutions of higher education. The Baker-Holt communities were undergoing changes. The once peaceful and stable rural farming community was changing in composition due to an influx of well-educated and well-traveled individuals who were moving from more densely populated areas in search of land. The new migrants moved their children from well-to-do suburban schools with their benefits and headaches to the slower pace of the rural school with its traditions of a more leisurely educational pace and of narrower views of educational expectations.

The change in population composition had caused the community to lack "community." While many patrons viewed the school as the agency most capable of creating and fostering "community," others viewed the school as the focus of their discontent with the area. (Performance of Baker-Holt students on state and nationally normed tests was the lowest in the county).

Resource Planning Committee

As a means of acquiring a broad base of collaborative involvement, the Teacher Corps project design called for the existence of a Resource Planning Committee. This Resource Planning Committee, composed of representatives from the Local Education Association, the University of West Florida and interested community school patrons, initiated an extensive needs-assessment of the Baker-Holt School and community. The needs-assessment revealed concerns in reference to community involvement, basic skills and school climate. The concerns in these areas and the mandated focuses of Teacher Corps projects resulted in the formulation of seven basic task forces which were to operate under the umbrella of the Resource Planning Committee. These task forces were to guide work in particular areas and to communicate with all other agencies and institutions sharing interest in education in the Baker-Holt community. Their major purpose was to marshall forces and guide improvement in the quality of education for the community and, in so far as possible, improve the quality of living within the community.

Graduate Program Task Force

A graduate program task force was charged to study the purposes and findings of each of the other task forces and to prepare a graduate program which would go far beyond the objectives required in other Teacher Corps projects. Teacher Corps graduate programs normally require only that the project interns have their specific graduate needs met. At Baker-Holt it was felt that if project goals were to be met, a major portion of the faculty would have to become involved in the graduate program; and that the program should have such direct impact on the needs of the school and community that all faculty and interested community members would seek participation in appropriate inservice/preservice activities.

No such field-based graduate programs in education existed at the University of West Florida. Existing graduate programs were more traditional in nature leading to Educational Leadership, Elementary Education and M.A.T. degrees. None were designed for on-site settings, and none provided the umbrella needed to initiate a field-based degree program for teachers in K-12 settings and interested community members.

The Graduate Program Task Force began its deliberations during the project planning year 1978. Fortunately several "movements" were occurring from various sources on the university campus which could quickly be brought to focus on this unique problem. The University Teacher Education Committee had created an ad hoc committee to design a Curriculum and Instruction Masters program to "be responsive to expanding professional needs."

This ad hoc committee had incorporated in its program deliberations considerations for on-site school-based delivery and flexibility in meeting diverse needs of individuals. Even though these efforts were just getting underway, there was a growing commitment at the University to explore novel delivery systems and new avenues of university-wide and college-wide cooperation. The efforts of key members of this ad hoc committee were sought, and the Teacher Corp Graduate Program Task Force was expanded to include these people. It was agreed that the Teacher Corps project would serve as an avenue of research that could lead to ultimate institutionalization of "more responsive" graduate programs.

On the University of West Florida campus it was procedural that all emerging programs be reviewed by a series of internal committees. For a proposed degree to be awarded program status, it was a necessary initial step that faculty committees review and approve new courses and tracks, then for college curriculum committees to review and approve them, and finally

for university committees to review and approve them. If a program appeared to be totally new, Board of Regent approval would have been required. These steps could have taken up to five years before ultimate approval was given; however, short cuts could have been made if it was mutually agreed that existing rubrics could be utilized. [These short cuts were facilitated by university reorganization that was underway.]

It was agreed that funds provided by the Teacher Corps project for faculty to instruct the interns could also be used to instruct an additional twenty-eight local teachers and qualifying community members. It was also agreed that courses which were already approved in two different departments could be coupled to a liberal interpretation of existing seminars and directed studies to provide an extremely broad range of options suitable for the various individual needs of the thirty-two graduate program participants. Until the new degree in Curriculum and Instruction was available, it was agreed that either the Elementary Education degree or the Educational Leadership degree could be offered to participants and that courses available in different programs could be offered simultaneously, team taught, as a common core for all participants.

DEGREE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The Graduate Degree Program Task Force formulated five specific guidelines for thinking, planning and implementing of program activities.

1. No reference would be made to the schools, the communities, or the students as being culturally disadvantaged.
2. All course work and experience would have to relate specifically to school situations.
3. Total-group class sessions would be maximized during and/or immediately following day working hours.

4. Instructor work with individuals would be maximized within the teacher classroom setting(s) and/or community.

5. The primary goal would be to change teacher behaviors.

6. Program requirements would have to meet the fifty-five quarter hour university department(s) programs.

7. The degree program would have to be completed within the two year time-span approved within the Teacher Corps project.

Core Courses

An eighteen quarter-hour common core constituted the first of three degree program components. These core courses were Curriculum Development, Classroom Management, Education Which Is Multi-cultural, and Advanced Teaching Techniques. This core of work was undertaken during the first year of the program.

Seminars/Directed Independent Studies

The second major component of the program was the elective Seminar/Directed Independent Studies (seventeen quarter hours). The nature of these Seminars/Directed Independent Studies emerged from the expressed needs of the participants. Some examples of the varied needs were "Parent Involvement," "Improvement of Reading," "Learning Styles," and "Values Orientations." These studies took place primarily during the second year of the program.

Specialization

The third component required each participant to become involved in an area of Specialization (twenty quarter hours) which included a major project: Action Research/Practicum/Thesis. During the 1980 summer term, participants came on campus to enroll in course work particular to their chosen area of specialization. These courses varied from "Advanced Intensive Spanish" to "Teaching Social Studies Games and Activities." This third component became the major focus of participant activity during the second year.

Scheduling

Scheduling for the Degree Program began in the Fall of 1979. Two afternoons each week were designated for degree program activities. The other days remained free of course work to allow teachers to participate in regular faculty functions. As much as possible, the county and local school administration left the scheduled class afternoon free of other meetings which might involve faculty members who were participating in the degree program. Degree program activities were organized in varied and multiple groupings ranging from individual to total school faculty involvement.

The university staff assigned to work with the project arranged their schedules to allow them to be in the site schools during the days set aside for degree-program activities. Classroom observations and individual and small group conferences were held throughout each day. Large group sessions were held following regular dismissal of Baker-Holt students.

During the summer of 1980, program participants attended classes on the University of West Florida campus. Individual selections of courses were made in reference to the specialization area approved in individual programs. Two ends were served by requiring students to attend the summer quarter session on the university campus. The first was to make available the multiple resources provided on campus in development and support of individual specialization areas. The second was to provide opportunity for a broad-base communication and exchange of ideas with other graduate students and university faculty.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

There were three major strategies which were employed to facilitate accomplishment of project goals related to inservice and staff development;

the Action Research/Practicum strategy, the Interaction Partnership strategy, and the Portfolio Building strategy.

Action Research/Practicum

Each of the four interns, as well as the twenty-eight teachers and community persons participating in the degree program, undertook the design and implementation of either an action research or a practicum.

An action research project was defined as action undertaken as a means to solving a specific problem. A practicum was defined as action undertaken in the implementation of an already validated program, material or teaching strategy. In both cases, the projects were selected to meet a specific need of the school and the interest and capability of each degree program participant.

Four specific procedures were adopted to support each project endeavor. Each action research/practicum was directed by an individual college of education professor who had some role in the other components of the degree program. Each professor directed no more than six projects. Another procedure in the implementation of the specialization projects called for the initiation of a prospectus prepared by the participant and signed by the director of each project, the principal or his designee, the Teacher Corps Project Director and the individual participant's degree program counselor.

A look at the project titles as submitted on the prospectuses reveal a wide array of undertakings. Specialization projects identified as practicums included the following: "Implementation of THINK with Title I Fifth Graders"; "MARC with Third Graders"; "CARE in Kindergarten"; "MAGIC CIRCLE with Fifth Graders"; "TALENTS UNLIMITED for Sixth Graders"; and "Using Merrill Linguistic Reading Materials for Reading Instruction of Selected Grade Three Pupils".

(Through applications of the participants involved, the Baker School received a $2,000 Title II Adopter Grant to assist in the implementation of the CARE project).

Action research projects had such titles as: "Teaching Children about Other Cultures through Physical Education"; "Effects of Individualizing of Mathematics for Title I"; "Motivation through Student Involvement in Historical Studies"; "Building Parenting Skills"; "EMC Curriculum Guide, I-12"; and "Individualizing Mathematics Instruction in Ninth Grade General Math through Grouping".

Interaction Partner System (IPS)

A third procedure planned to support each project was the extension of an Interaction Partner System (IPS). The IPS procedures called for each degree participant to select a teacher in the project schools who was not a degree program participant for the purposes of sharing, assisting and/or advising.

The Interaction Partner System was specifically conceived as a means of providing a site delivered inservice program by working "within" the pre-existing structure rather than "outside" it. Equally important, the IPS created a school-wide laboratory condition where the school sought solutions for its specific problems.

The Action Research/Practicum projects and the Interaction Partner System were two strategies used to deal with local, school and community problems. A second function of these strategies was to meaningfully involve individual teachers and the total school staff. Motivation for involvement was tied to the solution of those critical problems of personal and school-wide priority rather than to the acquisition of inservice credits.

Portfolio Building

The third strategy in the degree program involved, principally, the intern-teachers. As a focal point for the intern-teacher's development, ten major competency areas were chosen for data collection to serve as evidences of growth and change. This collection of data was identified as a portfolio. The process of building a portfolio was a very personalized system of data collection, interpretation, and analysis which led to an action commitment on the part of an individual intern-teacher.

Participants in the portfolio development were the intern-teacher and significant others who were referred to as The Support Team. An intern-teacher support team consisted of the intern-teacher, the classroom teacher with whom he/she was cooperating, the intern team leader, the school prinicpal or designee, a university faculty member, and others as deemed necessary.

There were four stages of development of the portfolio: (a) collection of portfolio data by the intern-teacher, (b) raising of issues, (c) valuing, and (d) commitment to action by the intern-teacher and the support team.

Initial data collection prepared by the intern-teacher as a participant/observer provided baseline data for the initiation of the portfolio process. In the second phase of the process of portfolio development the intern-teacher and members of The Support Team, to view the data, raised questions concerning any aspect of the work portrayed.

The third phase, valuing, began to operate during phase two. Commitments to action by the intern-teacher in the area of self improvement were based on the question-answering. This commitment to action required, most of all, that the intern-teacher <u>set in motion</u> certain types of activities that were mutually perceived as growth-producing opportunities.

The collection and utilization of data contained within the portfolio served two functions: (1) provision of the necessary data for formulating an evaluation of teaching competencies where the primary focus was on identification of strength and need areas as a means of promoting change within the individual intern-teacher; and (2) provision of evidence to the team of professionals who accepted the responsibility of facilitating growth and development of pre-service teachers.

Ten major competencies served as the focus of the data collected for inclusion in the portfolio. These competencies were previously formulated through collaborative efforts of individuals representing The University of West Florida and Florida Panhandle Area School Districts, and were used in Okaloosa County in a field-based inservice teacher certification program.

COMPETENCY STATEMENTS

I. Set up and maintain a safe and healthy learning environment.

II. Advance physical and intellectual competence.

III. Build positive self-concept.

IV. Organize and sustain a group learning environment in which children and adults can function positively.

V. Bring about optimal coordination of home and school expectations and practices.

VI. Carry out supplementary responsibilities related to the educational program.

VII. Demonstrate appropriate and effective communication skills.

VIII. Show knowledge of human growth and development.

IX. Apply knowledge appropriately in the development of "basic skills" and the acquisition of subject matter.

X. Engage in development of the professional self.

Conclusion

Even though this was a local, site-specific program, when there is a willingness on the part of communities, local education agencies and institutions of higher learning to solve common problems and to meet individual

needs, collaborative processes can produce programs which work for individual teachers and total school staff development. Perceived or actual blocks, are surmountable when the motivation and commitment to collaboration exists.